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RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS MONROVIA 000618

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W, INR/AA

E.O. 12598: N/A

TAGS: [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [LI](#)

SUBJECT: LIBERIA: FIRESTONE LIBERIA CONCLUDES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING  
AGREEMENT WITH UNION

REF: A) 07 MONROVIA 1439, B) 07 MONROVIA 1418, C) 07 MONROVIA 887,  
D) 07 MONROVIA 518, E) 07 MONROVIA 253

11. (U) Firestone Liberia concluded a labor agreement August 6 with the Firestone Allied Agricultural Workers Union of Liberia (FAAWUL).

The Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) covers over 4,000 workers and provides wage increases of 24% for rubber tappers (from a little over US\$3 to just under \$5 per day for three years) and 19.5% for salaried staff, retroactive to January 2007 when an internal union leadership battle halted previous CBA talks (ref A). Other CBA provisions include a 20% reduction of the daily rubber tree quota for tappers from 750 to 450-600 depending on the class of the trees.

The CBA also provides for further upgrades to housing, health and educational facilities for rubber tappers and their families. Firestone agreed to provide transportation to workers bringing latex to weigh stations [Note: previously tappers had to walk and carry rubber to weigh stations. End note]. The agreement follows several strikes in 2007 over labor conditions and union leadership (refs B).

12. (U) Firestone initiated CBA negotiations with previous union leadership in 2006 and had already embarked on many of the improvements in social infrastructure (health, education and housing) included in the CBA. Those prior talks broke down when the union split in early 2007 and an internal election was called in July 2007 (refs C-E). Results of that election remained in dispute and generated episodes of violence and unrest until a Supreme Court ruling in December 2007 ratified the election. Following the ruling, Firestone officially recognized the new FAAWUL leaders and CBA talks resumed in April, 2008.

13. (U) FAAWUL received support from the United Steelworkers Union (USW) and the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center during the negotiations and the Liberian Ministry of Labor mediated the discussions. The USW also provided a radio transmitter to establish a FAAWUL radio station in Firestone, while the AFL-CIO has promised to contribute US\$5,000 to FAAWUL for general administration.

14. (SBU) Firestone Liberia representatives told EconOff that negotiations were professional and productive and that relations with the union had improved since the unrest in 2007. FAAWUL told the Embassy that the present relationship with the management of Firestone is more cordial than before. At the end of the agreement FAAWUL committed to doing everything in its power to avoid strikes, disruption or work stoppages during the period covered by the new agreement (2007-2009). Firestone and FAAWUL will begin new negotiations in April 2009 for the 2010-2012 CBA.

ROBINSON